

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: January 14, 2016

Agenda Item: North Shore Wildlife Management Area Addition (R1)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 Min

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Background

FWP proposes to purchase 76.7 acres of farmland and wetlands located along the north shore of Flathead Lake about 4.5 miles east of Somers. The purpose of this acquisition is to restore or improve natural riparian/wetland habitat, to continue annual crop production to benefit resident and migratory waterfowl, to improve and maintain habitat for other wildlife, and to provide opportunities for seasonal public recreation. Other benefits include protecting ground water, surface water, and wetlands on or near Flathead Lake, which will help improve or maintain the high water quality of Flathead Lake for benefits of aquatic life and wildlife habitat.

The property sits on the eastern boundary of the 189-acre North Shore Wildlife Management Area that FWP acquired in 2013, which is adjacent to the 160-acre North Shore State Park/WMA that FWP acquired in 2008. The eastern border of the property is the access road to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Flathead Lake Waterfowl Production Area. FWP proposes to incorporate this property as part of the existing North Shore WMA. The landowner has agreed to sell this property for \$489,000, which is 25 percent below the appraised value of \$652,000. Funding for the project would be provided by the federal Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act. The Commission first endorsed this project in May 2015.

Public Involvement Process & Results

An environmental assessment was released for public comment Nov. 6 – Dec.5 and included a public hearing in Somers on Nov. 24. A legal notice was published in four local newspapers and the EA was posted on the FWP webpage. FWP received 14 public comments with 12 in favor of the acquisition, one expressing a management request, and one expressing various concerns about the acquisition. All comments are addressed in the project decision document.

Alternatives and Analysis

Two alternatives were analyzed and considered in the EA: 1) Proposed Action: Acquisition of the North Shore WMA proposed addition and 2) No Action: Do not purchase the property. Under the Proposed Action, the property would be added to the North Shore WMA Area and managed to enhance waterfowl, upland game bird, and riparian habitats along with protecting groundwater.

Under No Action, the property would likely be sold and developed, with potential impacts to wildlife, public access, and the ground and surface water quality of Flathead Lake's north shore.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the Commission approve the purchase of the North Shore WMA addition to maintain and improve wildlife habitats and public access along the north shore of Flathead Lake.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission approve the acquisition of the proposed addition to the North Shore WMA.